

The Challenge of Growth:

Managing the Expansion of Adventist Education Around the World

BY C. GARLAND DULAN

The Education Department of the General Conference is responsible for the supervision, coordination, promotion, training, and quality of the global Seventh-day Adventist educational program, which includes more than 7,000 schools, colleges, and universities, with approximately 75,000 teachers and more than 1.4 million students. Ours is one of the largest Protestant education programs in the world (see Table 1).

Working in close cooperation with the education directors of the 13 world divisions, the General Conference (GC) Education Department offers services to boards, administrators, and faculty of Adventist colleges and universities worldwide. The staff also provides support through the world divisions to educational leaders at union/conference/mission levels and to teachers in Adventist elementary and secondary schools to ensure that the Adventist philosophy of education and the principles of faith and learning are integrated into the life of each institution. In addition, the staff cooperates with Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries and the Youth Ministries Department in nurturing the faith of Adventist students attending non-Adventist

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The department's two publications, *The Journal of Adventist Education* and *Dialogue*, are produced in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

From its inception in 1872 to the present, the Lord has richly blessed the educational program of the church and has empowered it to expand in regions of the world that were earlier thought

impossible to reach. The church now has schools in more than 140 countries and continues to expand. Just since 1960, when statistics began to be listed by school categories rather than as an aggregate, the number of higher education institutions has increased from 42 to 106, secondary and worker training institutions have increased from 328 to more than 1,500, and elementary

Table 1. Seventh-day Adventist Education World Statistics¹

	Schools	Teachers	Students
Elementary	5,663	40,337	944,207
Secondary	1,472	23,968	380,213
Training Schools	42	533	7,100
Colleges/Universities	106	9,745	106,081
Totals	7,283	74,583	1,437,601

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schools have increased from 4,400 to more than 5,600. In fact, between 1990 and 2000, the church added 18 new colleges and universities, as well as more than 140 secondary and worker-training institutions. Another 12 higher education institutions and 352 secondary and worker training schools have been added since 2000.

Maintaining Adventist Educational Philosophy

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered. Adventists believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and in nature. The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings to the image of their Maker.²

Academic goals, curricula, hiring policies for faculty and staff, admissions criteria for students, on-campus religious and secular activities, student-life services and activities, student conduct requirements, dormitory facilities, and other co-curricular functions are centered in the Adventist educational philosophy. Foods served in the cafeteria, groups and organizations allowed to form on campus, and the like are evaluated on the basis of the church's philosophy of education.

International Acceptance of Adventist Higher Education

In the past 10 years, some government authorities have requested the accreditation documents that the church uses in assessing the quality of its institutions. The governments of these countries have recognized the value of the church's accreditation procedures and have indicated an interest in adopting some of our review processes.

Also, in recent years, several governments have contacted our institutions to offer charters. When a private university is recognized as on par with the government institutions of such countries, this is so remarkable that it is featured on the national news. As a consequence, a large number of (mainly non-Adventist)

students flock to the newly recognized institution, often dramatically increasing its enrollment.

Rapid Growth and Change

A common scenario is for an institution to begin small, between 200-300 students, of which 95 to 100 percent are Adventists. The predominant and in some instances, only academic program on such a campus is religion or theology. Rarely are there any non-Adventist teachers at this time.

Then the government recognizes the institution as offering quality education and offers an official charter—putting it on a par with public tertiary institutions in that country. This is when the changes and challenges begin to occur. There is usually a rapid influx of students, most of whom are not Adventists and have little understanding of church doctrines or lifestyle. The institution praises the Lord for the new students, viewing this as an answer to prayer, a public affirmation of Adventist education, and as a way to ensure the school's financial viability, as well as an opportunity for carrying out the mission of the church.

Prior to receiving the government charter, the institution submits to the government a list of "potential" degree programs it would like to offer should it be issued a charter. Once the charter is granted, the institution feels obligated to begin offering the degrees as soon as possible, regardless of available resources, fearing that unless it does so, the government may decide that the institution was not serious about its intent to expand and meet the needs of the citizenry, and may revoke the charter.

At this point, the institution petitions the church to allow it to rapidly begin offering the new programs that have been approved by the government's charter. (Such petitions are to be submitted through the General Conference Education Department to the International Board of Education, the church entity responsible for authorizing new tertiary programs.) The petition must answer the questions raised in Table 2.

Since the institution already has government approval, it probably wants to inaugurate the new programs as soon as possible, so it pressures church agencies to fast-track denominational authorization. Meanwhile, to generate interest in the programs, the institution promotes them to potential students who, having

Table 2. Proposal Requirements

1. Name of the proposed new academic program.
2. Need for the program.
3. How does the program support the church's and institution's mission?
4. Resources available to the institution to offer the program.
 - a. Human—available Adventist faculty and their qualifications.
 - b. Financial—how does the institution plan to sustain the program after it starts?
 - c. Physical plant facilities available to offer the program.
 - d. Equipment, library books, and other academic support needed.
5. Target group of students for whom the program is intended (including the number expected/recruited).
6. Curriculum proposed.
7. Effect of the proposed program on the institutional environment.
8. Outcomes expected of graduates from the new academic program.
9. When the program is proposed to begin.
10. Is there regional or governmental support for the program?
11. Does the institutional board support the program?
12. Does the division support the program?

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received glossy promotional materials or visits from college marketing people, expect to be able to enroll right away.

The evaluation of the proposal follows the steps shown in Table 3 (for institutions without a proven positive track record).

The church's consideration/evaluation of the proposal may take longer than the institution expects, especially during steps 4-6. Sometimes school administrators do not realize that evaluation of aca-

demie program proposals requires peer review. Therefore, professionals with expertise in related fields must study the proposals and submit their comments to the Department of Education, which then relays them to the institution seeking program approval.

The General Conference Education Department serves as the clearinghouse for all such proposals. In many cases, institutions' proposals must undergo revision in order to be acceptable to the

oversight board(s). This, of course, takes time.

Once the revised proposal is sent to the International Board of Education or the IBMTE (whichever is appropriate), the board may mandate a site visit to the institution in order to examine its readiness to begin offering the proposed academic program.

The speed at which a proposal receives approval depends upon the status of the institution submitting it. For instance, if the team making a site visit to a new institution determines that the institution is ready to initiate programs and has the capacity to do so, the process for proposal approval is essentially the same as for an *established* institution. However, if an institution is on *probation*, there is often a freeze on the initiation of new programs or a limit placed on how many new programs the school may start until the probationary status is lifted.

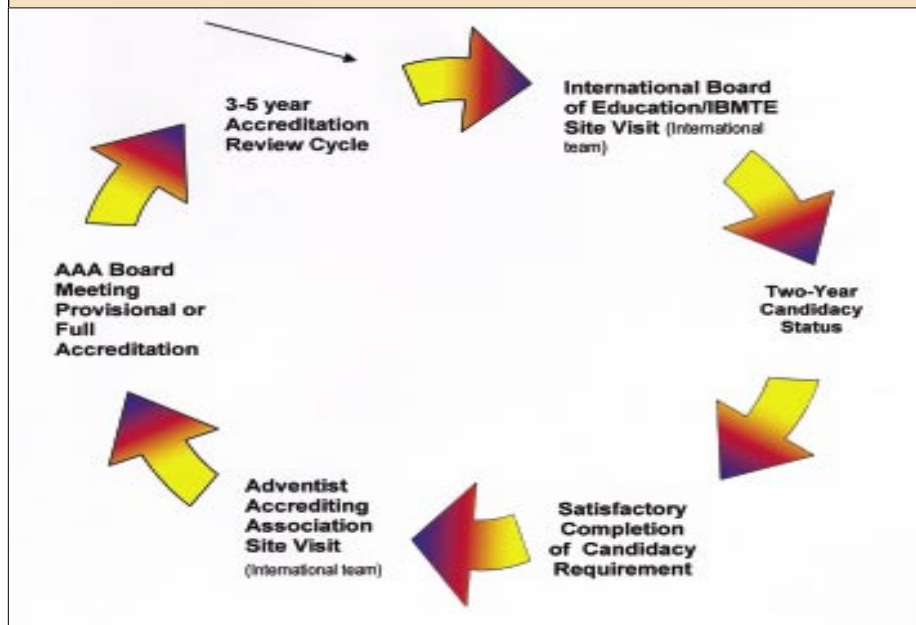
Developing a Site Visit Team

In conjunction with the education director of the division from which the proposal has come, the General Conference Education Department develops a team of specialists to conduct the institutional site visit. This involves not only the selection of individuals with the appropriate expertise, but also assistance with flight schedules, meeting times, interview questions, and documentation materials—all of which must be coordinated with the administration of the institution whose proposed program is being reviewed. After the institutional visit, the team's report is forwarded to the appropriate review board, which decides whether to approve the program(s). At this point, the proposal is either approved for implementation or rejected.

It is not hard to understand why institutions become impatient with the process of proposal consideration and authorization. Anticipating a positive response, they may have advertised the startup date for the proposed academic program prior to submitting the formal proposal. Should delays occur due to inadequately developed proposals, scheduling the onsite visit, or securing

Table 3. International Board of Education and IBMTE Appropriate Approval Process for New Programs

1. E-mail notification to the institutional board/union conference, division, and GC Education Department of the institution's intent to develop a new program.
2. Proposal development/approval by local board.
3. Proposal submitted to the division education director, the government, and GC Education Department.
4. Review by GC Education Department/consultation with specialists.
5. Comments sent back to institution with request for revision of proposal (if necessary).
6. Review/approval by division.
7. Submission by division education director (through GC Education Department) to IBE or IBMTE.



experts to serve on the site team, the administrators of the institution become frustrated. In some instances, institutions have actually enrolled students and started programs before final authorization has been granted. This can have catastrophic consequences, should the program fail to gain approval or should health-related programs be instituted that pose complications due to inad-

to 80 percent non-Adventists. The new students soon begin to recognize that the social and spiritual lifestyle expectations are quite different than what they have previously experienced. There are dormitory curfews, expected and/or required worship services, “strange” cafeteria food, Sabbath observance issues, prohibition of tobacco and alcohol use, and so forth. The campus climate,

the values and commonly understood practices, codes of conduct, and ethics that Adventists have grown to expect are eroded due to the new students’ discomfort with the standards

the needs of students, (2) on-campus facilities for students—i.e., dormitories, food-service facilities, and library support for new academic programs, and (3) the often-sudden change in campus climate produced by the influx of mostly non-Adventist students. Often, the spiritual tone of the campus undergoes rapid change.

In my experience, institutions tend to minimize the difficulty of meeting these three challenges. Their success in these areas depends on how well the campus has planned for the proposed changes. Unfortunately, some institutional responses have produced less-than-positive outcomes. A number of institutions have hired non-Adventist teachers; some have overcrowded their dormitories, creating dismal living conditions for students; and others have had to confront irate students who quickly realized that the institution had not made adequate preparation for them. New students may quickly conclude that the institution has only admitted them in order to “make money” rather than to meet their academic needs.

Table 4. Enrollment: Adventist Primary Schools Worldwide³

	2001	2006	Change
Total Students	732,698	944,207	+211,509
SDA Students	335,986 (45.9%)	402,811 (42.7%)	+66,825
Non-SDAs	396,712 (54.1%)	541,396 (57.3%)	+144,684

equately trained students, unqualified faculty, or lawsuits alleging medical malpractice.

of the school, and perhaps the failure of the faculty and administration to publicize and/or explain the rules.

Student Life and Conduct

As the new programs are announced (and even in anticipation), the campus ratio of Adventists to non-Adventist students changes rapidly, often from a 95 percent Adventist population to 70

Major Considerations

When our higher education institutions expand rapidly, at least three issues become critical: (1) the availability of Seventh-day Adventist faculty and staff to provide instruction and care for

When these problems occur, the General Conference Education Department often gets a call for help. Clearly, if these institutions had followed the rules and submitted to the appropriate approval process for proposed programs, many of these issues could have been prevented or amicably resolved.

The Potential Benefits of Expansion

Table 4 shows that over the five-year period from 2001 to 2006, Adventist primary school enrollment worldwide increased by 211,000 students, and that by 2006, 57 percent came from other faith communities. (This compares to a non-Adventist enrollment of 40 percent in our tertiary institutions and almost 62 percent in our secondary schools worldwide in 2006.) This trend suggests that other faith groups are selecting Adventist schools in significantly larger numbers than are Adventist students and parents. These changes suggest the need for careful review to ensure that current



Week of prayer, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (Philippines)

Table 5. Adventist Education Statistics from 1960 to 2000⁴

Year	Tertiary Institutions		Secondary and Worker Training Institutions		Primary Schools	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
1960	42	16,513	328	43,041	4,453	230,446
1980	76	32,882	806	111,927	3,849	331,894
1990	76	42,562	919	153,453	4,627	540,647
2000	94	65,589	1,161	266,805	4,809	732,698



Business class at Adventist University Cosendai (Yaounde, Cameroon).



Science laboratory at Spicer Memorial College (Pune, India).

and anticipated trends correlate to the educational philosophy and mission of the church.

While challenges will always accompany institutional expansion, growth also offers the potential for positive outcomes. One is the opportunity to reach students of other faiths who know little or nothing about Adventist beliefs. The opportunity can be exciting, since this provides a powerful reason for focused planning of spiritual activities, evangelistic opportunities for campus ministry,

and outreach. Statistics show that the average number of baptisms on Adventist primary, secondary, and higher education campuses over the past five years totaled more than 30,000 per year.

Current Work of the Department

Ensuring the quality and consistency of the Adventist educational program and keeping it aligned with the church's mission is always challenging and often difficult. It involves collaboration, consultation, and cooperation by many levels of church organization. In addition, committed specialists dedicate a great deal of time, effort, and resources, on top of their regular responsibilities at other church entities such as conferences, hospitals, and colleges/universities.

We see evidence that the Lord is

blessing the work of the church through its education program and are pleased to be a part of the process. Opportunities abound for sharing the gospel through Adventist education, and though challenges accompany growth, God is more than able to help us meet these challenges.

The General Conference Department of Education wishes to encourage greater cooperation from institutions in following established church guidelines for ensuring quality academic programs throughout the world. We are currently studying ways to streamline proposal review and approval, and hope that within the 2008 calendar year, changes can be implemented to make the process less onerous for higher education institutions. We solicit your input and suggestions. ✍



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REFERENCES

1. Source: *144th Annual Statistical Report—2006*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Compiled by the Office of Archives and Statistics.
2. Source: FE 05 10 *General Conference Working Policy 2006-2007*, p. 213.
3. *144th Annual Statistical Report—2006*.
4. *Ibid*